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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001500

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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2019

TAGS: [CY](#) [EU](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKS ACCENT THE POSITIVE IN EU PROGRESS REPORT

REF: ANKARA 1455

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: State Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bagis and the MFA offered a broadly positive official reaction to the European Commission's 12th annual progress report, released October 14. Both Bagis and the MFA portrayed the report in their public statements as endorsing the government's reform efforts and welcoming Turkey's ability to contribute to the expansion of the EU's influence in the Middle East. Both rejected the report's criticism of Turkey over Cyprus. For the balance of this year, Cyprus will likely overshadow the EU's accession dialogue with Turkey. End Summary.

12. (SBU) State Minister for EU Affairs Egemen Bagis and the MFA separately framed a constructive official reaction to the European Commission's "Turkey 2009 Progress Report" and the Enlargement Strategy Paper, both published October 14. Bagis publicly described the report, the twelfth in the annual series, as "in general, positive and balanced" and "the most objective report ever issued." He interpreted it as encouraging the GOT's commitment to its current reform path.

13. (C) Alp Ay, Director of Political Affairs in Bagis's Secretariat General for EU Affairs, told us the report's endorsement of the Democratic Opening and the normalization process with Armenia will be motivating factors for the government. He took in stride criticisms of restrictions on freedom of speech and religion, promising the government's increased focus on these deficiencies. Aly claimed to be hopeful about the 2010 Progress Report: "We are already working hard on the areas for which we received criticism. We are expecting to achieve concrete results by 2010." His colleague, Seval Isik, Director of Accession Policy, took encouragement from the report's grading of 18 of the 33 acquis chapters as "improved" or "greatly improved." He argued these grades highlight the arbitrariness of certain EU countries, who have frozen 17 chapters for "political reasons."

14. (U) The MFA took the opportunity of the report's publication to reaffirm EU accession as Turkey's primary foreign policy goal. An MFA press release cited the report's characterization of Turkey as a key player in its region's security, energy supply and the promotion of dialogue between civilizations. According to the MFA, this characterization justifies its assertion that Turkey's future admission would contribute to the EU's "aim of strengthening its role in the world of the future." The MFA acknowledged without defensiveness the report's identification of shortcomings in Turkey's progress, benignly interpreting the report's

citation of these shortcomings as usefully highlighting areas upon which the GOT should focus its reform efforts.

¶5. (SBU) Both Bagis and the MFA rejected the report's criticism of Turkey over Cyprus. Bagis flatly dismissed the criticism as "unjust." The MFA asserted Turkey's full support for the comprehensive Cyprus negotiations and implied an EU deficiency in its support for the UN-mediated reconciliation process. Neither Bagis nor the MFA referred explicitly to the report's pointed criticism of Turkey's unwillingness to open its ports to Greek Cypriot vessels, in accordance with the Additional Ankara Protocol (AAP).

¶6. (U) The report received broad media coverage, but drew little reaction from the public. Main stream newspapers offered balanced analyses. Several cited favorably the report's praise for:

- Turkey's general elections, which have been held in a free and democratic atmosphere;
- The government's Democratic (Kurdish) Opening and the loosening of restrictions on Kurdish-language TV broadcasts;
- President Gul's efforts to promote dialogue between political parties;
- The soundness of Turkey's banking sector and the government's success in easing the global recession's impact on the Turkish citizenry;
- The Ergenekon investigation for probing into state-affiliated actors' subversion of democratic institutions;
- Turkey's positive role in contributing to regional

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security, secure energy transshipment and the dialogue between civilizations;

- Turkey's steps towards rapprochement with Armenia;
- The strengthening of the civilian judiciary to enable its accommodation of legal actions against military personnel;
- The appointment of Bagis and his success in coordinating an inter-ministerial approach to reform and his advocacy of Turkey's EU candidacy to civil society;
- The government's opening of a dialogue with Turkey's Alevi religious minority.

¶7. (U) The press offered little commentary on the report's criticism of:

- Turkey's failure "to take practical steps to contribute to creating a climate favorable to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem;"
- The slow pace of reforms;
- The lack of independence, impartiality, effectiveness and efficiency of the judiciary;
- The continued excessive influence of the military in domestic and foreign policy issues beyond its remit;
- The failure of the government to amend the 1980 constitution to provide stronger guarantees of fundamental freedoms in line with EU standards.

¶8. (C) Swedish Embassy DCM Urban Andersson told us that Turkish reaction, so far, seems to positive and that the Turks clearly see the report as balanced. Andersson pointed out that the report actually contained important criticism on the lack of reform and progress needed for membership. The report did indeed highlight some of the positive diplomatic developments that Turkey has been pursuing recently, he noted. He told us that as long as Cyprus negotiations are still on track in December the EC will roll over the Additional Ankara Protocol decision to 2010, but that if things turn badly with the Cyprus talks the EU will not be able to just push the issue until next year. EU Commission Political Counselor Diego Mellado told us the report's drafters had sought to maintain a positive tone. German Embassy Political Counselor Arno Kirchhoff was more blunt, saying the report this was "really soft" this year so as not to provoke a Turkish reaction that might negatively impact

the Cyprus talks.

¶9. (C) We sounded out several think tank analysts, both of whom seized on the report's elements pertaining to Cyprus and freedom of expression. Murat Erdogan, Deputy Director of the EU Research and Application Center at Hacetepe University, noted that the comments on the Cyprus issue were not surprising and that, compared to previous reports, they seemed relative mild. He pointed out that despite the criticism, the report does not include any sanctions. He also commented that Turkey was criticized for limitations on freedom of speech and Article 301 and that this is indeed "an issue that Turkey needs to work on." SETA Director Taha Ozhan told us he thinks the report's comments on Turkey,s EU reforms were fair. He particularly noted that the statements on opening Turkey,s harbors to Cyprus were positive. However, he did not consider it fair that the report included the Dogan Media Group,s tax evasion fine. He saw this as proof that strong lobbying in the last month could manipulate the EU Commission,s opinion. He pointed out that the Government had levied billion dollar tax fines for other companies as well, but that none of these examples had been reflected in the report.

¶10. (C) Comment: The measured Turkish response to the report is a tribute to its careful drafting. If the drafters' intent was to avoid provoking Turkey, they seem to have achieved their goal. Their concern highlights, once again, that, for the balance of this year, Cyprus is likely to become the primary focus of the EU's accession dialogue with Turkey.

JEFFREY

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